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authorities to use it, putting up a stove for our purposes. A wash tub and the top of an old-style Arnold sterilizer solved the problem. The steamed linen and gauze had to be carried to the hospital, as well as all of the boiled water and instruments. No bad results! Just a little patience, and the exercise of all the inventiveness we possessed, or could borrow from our friends, were needed.

This is told just to show that the nurse must always be ready to meet emergencies, and to make the best of every situation in which she finds herself.

All this holds good, not only in the matter of the preparation of a room in a private house for an operation, but in all kinds of private work, indeed even in hospitals, to a certain degree. The idea is that of making use of everything at hand, rather than constantly demanding appliances for the care of the sick, unless there is absolute necessity for them. The most successful nurse, the one who will be the most acceptable to patients, the one whom families will be most glad to welcome again and again, will be the one who makes the best use of everything at hand, under all circumstances, in every direction, in which she finds herself.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

By ELLEN BERTHA BRADLEY, R.N.

*Graduate of Bellevue Hospital, New York*

We must all have read, with deep interest, Miss Jaquith's article on "The Menace of the Feeble-Minded?" in the January issue of *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*, for it was an able and thoughtful discussion of a serious problem. Probably, we all agree with her that feeble-minded women should be segregated for their own protection and to prevent their becoming the mothers of abnormal children, but this would be only a partial solution of the problem, because of the great number of border-line cases, women unfit for motherhood, but not marked enough for it to be practicable to shut them up, and also because it would not touch the male side of the question, and would leave abnormal, syphilitic and alcoholic men to go on having defective children.

Scientific authorities are well agreed that the main causes of mental and physical degeneracy are syphilis and alcohol, twin evils so closely interwoven that it is often hard to separate them in the individual case.

In this brief article we shall take up only the question of alcohol in its relation to degeneracy, and what can be done about it.

A booklet published by the State Charities Aid Association of New York says:

Fully 30 per cent of the men and 10 per cent of the women admitted to the State Hospitals are suffering from conditions due directly or indirectly to alcohol. So marked is the effect of alcohol on the brain and the nerve tissue that it helps to bring about a number of mental breakdowns in addition to the alcoholic insanities.

Alcohol is a poison. A long series of careful tests performed by eminent authorities showed that even small quantities of alcohol may lower the mental capacity, and that it takes much longer than is usually supposed for this effect to wear off.

This is not a temperance tract. We are dealing only with scientific facts. It is difficult, however, to state the facts as now agreed upon by the highest medical authorities without seeming to preach.

T. Alexander MacNicholl, M.D., one of the founders of the Red Cross, who has for more than twenty years made a special study of the causes of degeneracy, especially among children, says:

The great burden of drink is not borne by the drinker but by the drinker's children. The germ cell that is to be evolved into another being is the most highly organized of all the cells in the body. In its protoplasm lies the material and pattern of the perfected organism. Should such poison as alcohol lessen the nutrition of the cell or impair the quality of the protoplasmic material and deface the pattern, these shortcomings and defects would be manifested in the subsequent stages of development. A defective germ cell can not evolve a normal body. This is the reason that we find a large percentage of functional and organic diseases among the children of drinking parents.

In our studies among school children in New York City we find that 62 per cent are the children of drinking parents; and that 91 per cent of these children of drinking parents suffer from some functional or organic disease. In one institution for the treatment of physical defectives a recent study shows that every patient is the child of drinking parents.

My studies during the past twenty years, continuous to date, indicate a steadily increasing degeneracy among drinkers' children. One out of every five children, born to drinking parents, will be insane. One out of every three children born to drinking parents will suffer from epilepsy and hysteria. At this rate of insanity among drinkers' children, and with an increased per capita consumption of alcoholic liquors, we must expect a very largely increased number of insane among the children of the next generation.

Frank DeWitt Reese, M.D., surgeon to the Cortland County Hospital, Cortland, New York, after describing the germ cells and their special affinity for, and sensitiveness to, alcohol, goes on to say:

Let us see what alcohol does when it begins with the grandparents. Suppose one grandparent is in the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages, moderately every day. In time the alcohol must come in contact with and damage the germ cell.

This damaged cell unites with a normal one to form an individual. One-half of that individual will be damaged to begin with, and for generations degenerate children may be born. One may be a thief, another a consumptive, or epileptic, a murderer, or a prostitute, and so on generation after generation. Who is to blame? The grandfather who damaged the cell perhaps before his marriage by moderate drinking. From a physician's standpoint the remedy is total abstinence for the individual, and the segregation of the sexes, of those who are degenerates. [Slightly abridged.]

Dr. Frederick Peterson of New York City, in an address at Elmira, New York, before the New York State Conference of Charities and Correction, declared:

Alcohol is the chief poison factor in the production of insanity. Six thousand patients in the state of New York alone owe their insanity to alcohol. Twenty per cent of all the insane in the United States owe their condition to alcoholic poison.

In an article published in *The Lawyer's Magazine*, for December, 1913, Herbert C. Shattuck, a member of the New York Bar, tells us that Dr. Thomas W. Salmon is authority for the statement that

Examinations of birth dates of idiots and imbeciles in Switzerland show that conception occurred in a large proportion of cases at seasons of the year when celebrations of certain festivals were in progress accompanied by much intoxication. It is said that this fact is popularly recognized, and that such children are known in certain districts, as "Rauschkinder" (jag children).

A few days ago I heard this statement repeated by Col. L. Mervin Maus, Chief Surgeon and Chief Inspector of the Eastern Division of the United States Army. He is the man who cleaned up the Philippines as Colonel Gorgas has the Panama Zone and stands with him at the very head of the surgeons of the army. The choice for position as Surgeon-General, at the retirement of Surgeon-General Wood, lay between them, but Colonel Gorgas received the nomination. This I state merely to show the professional standing and authority of Colonel Maus.

I wish every one of us might have heard his address on alcohol and its physiological effect, especially on the unborn, and when taken in what would be considered moderate amounts. The presence of even a small quantity in the system of either parent, but especially the mother, at the time of conception, poisoned the child from the start. The reason, he said, why so few great men had great sons was because by being dined and wined and by the private use of alcohol most of them so fill their systems with alcohol that they poison their children at conception, killing them as absolutely as by a blow of an ax. There-

fore the prominent families die out and their places are taken by men who rise from the temperate middle classes.

But why multiply authorities for what we know all too well? The real question is: "What can we, as nurses, do about this evil? What is our share in stopping the destruction?"

It consists in just two things, example and teaching. Always and everywhere we can set the example of total abstinence and explain it by explaining that alcohol is a poison and that we do not wish to poison ourselves; that it makes us more liable to contagion, and that being always exposed to disease germs it becomes us to be careful. To expectant mothers we can speak of the necessity of keeping their systems clear of alcohol. We can warn young girls against marrying men who drink even a little, not only because a little may lead to more, but because of its probable effect upon their children; and when it is too late for that warning, we can caution them that when there has been wine for dinner, no chances must be taken of conception till it has absolutely passed out of the system of both.

No women, except doctors, have such opportunities as we to inculcate the truest information on these subjects, the sane, practical, scientific information that leads to results.

Let us do what Miss Jaquith suggests, but let us also try to thus strike at the root of the Upas tree of alcoholism. Nothing will build up temperance sentiment and temperance action so well so accurate scientific knowledge, and we are a great company of women to publish the tidings.

## A CALL TO THE COUNTRY

By ALICE JANE DREW, R.N.

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Having just returned from a long tedious case, I was preparing for a good night's sleep, when the telephone rang. It was a call, scarlet fever, in the country. Being very weary, my first thought was to refuse, but something said, "Go."

I hurriedly packed my bag, looked at the time table, and found I had thirty minutes before the last train left that would stop at W.

It was snowing very hard, but I drew on my crocheted cap and heavy ulster, and started for the drug store for a supply of carbolic. At this store is a nurses' registry. The head clerk asked where I was going. When I told him, he replied, "Well, you are brave. Dr. B. phoned here, and I told him we did not have a nurse that would take the case. Do you know, there are four children sick with scarlet fever,